



Charleston County School District
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Media Release

CCSD Sets New District Record With 46 National Merit Scholarship Semifinalists for 2026

List includes 31 students from Academic Magnet

Charleston, SC (September 11, 2025) – Charleston County School District (CCSD) is proud to announce that a district record and state best 46 students from a combined five high schools are 2026 semifinalists in the National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC) for the 71st annual National Merit Scholarship Program. The previous district mark was set in 2020 with 42 NMSC semifinalists.

In addition, Academic Magnet High School leads the state with 31 semifinalists, setting a new school and district record.

"We are incredibly proud to celebrate the most National Merit Finalists in the history of CCSD," said Superintendent of Schools Anita Huggins. "This remarkable achievement reflects the extraordinary talent, determination, and perseverance of our students and the support of their families, teachers, and schools. These finalists embody the spirit of excellence that defines CCSD, and we are honored to recognize them as shining examples of what is possible when hard work and opportunity align."

The following CCSD students are 2026 semifinalists:

Academic Magnet High School

Leah Bagg
 Elena Barber
 Jacob Beuk
 Chase Broadway
 Margaret Brock
 Mason Fisher
 Mateus Guimaraes
 Francesco Hamilton
 Ella Heichelbech
 Noah Houfek
 Daniel Huang
 Isa Jickling
 Whitney Limbert
 Theodore Lorusso
 Tiana Mallawaarachy



Charleston County
SCHOOL DISTRICT

Anita W. Huggins, M.Ed., Superintendent of Schools
 Andy Pruitt, Director of Communications

Louise Martin
Eli Mitchell
Steven Moody
Vanessa Nguyen
Zavier Nutting
Jennifer Pelic
Dylan Rhyne
Nora Richards
Liam Rohrbacher
Alyssa Rowell
Riley Shelley
Winfield Swing
Joseph Tierney
Emme Williamson
Yiqing Ye
Erick Yu

Charleston County School of the Arts

Grace Fayette
William Henrikson
Katherine Largent
Brooklyn Mayberry
Sophia Milner
Estee Yu

Lucy Beckham High School

Abigail Haire
Evan Newman

Wando High School

Adelaide Lanz
Aiden Manley
Jack Solinger
Samuel Treptow
Maxwell Winters
Sophia Yacoub

West Ashley High School

Noah Todd

Academic Magnet's previous high for National Merit Semifinalists was 29 in 2020, the same year the district set its previous record.

"Our entire AMHS faculty is so proud of these scholars who are already achieving at the most elite academic levels," explained Jacob Perlmutter, Academic Magnet's principal. "We can't wait to see their continued contributions to our world."

These 46 CCSD high school seniors will compete for 6,930 National Merit Scholarships worth nearly \$26 million, which will be awarded in the spring. About 95 percent of the semifinalists are expected to earn recognition as a finalist, and approximately half of the finalists will win a National Merit Scholarship.

High school juniors entered the 2026 National Merit Scholarship Program by taking the 2024 Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT), which served as an initial screen of program entrants. The nationwide pool of semifinalists, representing less than one percent of U.S. high school seniors, includes the highest-scoring entrants in each state. The number of semifinalists in a state is proportional to the state's percentage of the national total of graduating seniors.

To become a finalist, the semifinalist and a high school official must submit a detailed scholarship application including the student's academic record, participation in school and community activities, demonstrated leadership abilities, employment, and honors and awards. A semifinalist must have an outstanding academic record throughout high school, be endorsed and recommended by a high school official, write an essay, and earn SAT or ACT scores that confirm the student's earlier performance on the qualifying test.

2026 National Merit Scholarship winners will be announced in four nationwide news releases beginning in April and concluding in July. These scholarship recipients will join more than 389,000 other distinguished young people with the Merit Scholar title.

For more information, contact CCSD's Office of Communications at (843) 937-6303.

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About the Charleston County School District

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is a nationally accredited school district committed to providing equitable and quality educational opportunities for all its students. CCSD is the second-largest school system in South Carolina and represents a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools spanning 1,300 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves approximately 51,000 students in 90 schools and specialized programs.

CCSD offers a diverse portfolio of educational options and specialized programs delivered to the students of CCSD through neighborhood, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), Montessori, and charter schools and programs. Rich educational opportunities for students include programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; military; dual credit; and many more.